

# The Lamp

Volume 19, Issue 4—December 12, 2014

United States Association of  
Consecrated Virgins

SERVING THE VOCATION OF CONSECRATED VIRGINITY  
**USACV**  
www.consecratedvirgins.org

## TO THE MEMBERS OF THE UNITED STATES ASSOCIATION OF CONSECRATED VIRGINS:

December 12, 2014 Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

To the Members of the United State Association of Consecrated Virgins,

The Synod of 1994 dealt with Consecrated Life, giving rise to St. John Paul's Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, in 1996. One of the forms celebrated in that text was "a new flowering of the ancient Order of Virgins.... Consecrated by the diocesan bishop, these women acquire a particular link with the local Church, which they are committed to serve while remaining in the world. Either alone or in association with others, they constitute a special eschatological image of the Heavenly Bride and of the life to come, when the Church will at least fully live her love for Christ the Bridegroom" (#7.1).

As we celebrate this Year of Consecrated Life, it is good to see how Consecrated Virginity is also to be celebrated. The first part of *Vita Consecrata* discusses the origins of consecrated life. This rests on a special relationship with Jesus such that they not only welcome the Kingdom of God into their lives, but they "put their lives at its service, leaving everything behind and closely imitating his own way of life" (#14.1).

This is especially true of the gift of your virginity. In Jesus' own obedience to his Father, he "lives his life as a virgin, even while affirming and defending the dignity and sanctity of married life. He thus reveals the sublime excellence and mysterious fruitfulness of virginity" (#22.2). This fruitfulness is meant to be a sign for the whole world to see and thus "the Church has a right to expect a significant contribution from consecrated persons, called as they are in every situation to bear clear witness that they belong to Christ" (#25.4).

And that contribution is fundamentally the way in which your life is an eschatological sign pointing to the future, where your true treasure lies. In this your virginity is "an anticipation of the world to come, already at work for the total transformation of man" (#26.3).

May Jesus and Mary, his mother, be a source of great peace for you this Advent and Christmas as you renew this great gift of yourself to the Father for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Most Reverend Earl Boyea  
Bishop of Lansing



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### Special Points of Interest:

- Upcoming Events
- Consecrations

The Mystery of our Salvation, *Mysterium Salutis*, refers to the dogmatic interpretation of the history of our salvation. As we approach the Incarnation of our Divine Lord Jesus Christ there are no better words of introduction than those given to us by Saint Paul: "We impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification" (1 Cor. 2:7).

The Eternal Father in the Protoevangelium, concerning our redemption from original sin, sentenced the devil with these words: "I shall put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; it will bruise your head and you will strike its heel." It is understood that "the woman" is interpreted not only as the Spouse of His Son, the Church, but also as Mary of Nazareth, the Mother of the Church and the Queen of Virgins because of her "fiat" or "yes" to the Eternal Father's eternal call to her. Eve did not accept her motherhood in virginity, but Mary did: "The day of the Annunciation of the Lord to the Virgin Mary is the origin of Christian virginity: it is born in the moment of the "yes" of the Virgin to the divine maternity." (Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, "Homily at the Consecration of a Virgin," 1988, quoted by Judith M. Stegman, M.A., Thesis, "Virginal Chastity in the Consecrated Virgin," 2014).

The mystery of virginity exists in the very essence of the Eternal Father and was first revealed in Paradise as He invited Adam and Eve to accept virginity from him by a free will decision. "Gregory of Nyssa, brother of the virgin-saint Macrina, explored the Trinitarian roots underlying the 'surpassing excellence' of the grace of virginity: '[The grace of virginity] is comprehended in the idea of the Father incorrupt; and here at the outset is a paradox - that virginity is found in Him, who has a Son and yet without passion has begotten Him. It is included too in the nature of this Only-begotten God, who struck the first note of all this moral innocence; it shines forth equally in His pure and passionless generation. Again a paradox: that the Son be known to us by virginity. It is seen, too, in the inherent and incorruptible purity of the Holy Spirit; for when you have named the pure and incorruptible you have named virginity.'" (Gregory of Nyssa, "On Virginity," quoted by Judith M. Stegman).

Mary of Nazareth is with child, fulfilling the prophecy announced some 750 years earlier: "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin

shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel" (Is. 7:14).

"Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman, robed with the sun, standing on the moon, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was with child (Rev. 12:1-2a). This prophecy gives room to speak about the presence of our Mary of Nazareth, our Blessed Mother, in her Son's Church. She is the Mother of the Church and she is a sign coming to us from the will of the Eternal Father.



We are celebrating the Feast of our Lady of Guadalupe. Her appearance in Guadalupe was as Saint John the Evangelist described her in his vision in Patmos: "Robed with the sun, standing on the moon;" she was with child, although not in the process of delivery as St. John expressed. She appeared in the Tepeyac Hill in Guadalupe, Mexico to Juan Diego (a native Mexican) on the 9th and 12th of December 1531. Speaking the language of the native Mexican of that time, she revealed to him: "Know for certain that I am the perfect and perpetual Virgin Mary, Mother of the True God...here I will show and offer all my love, my compassion, my help and protection to the people. I am your merciful Mother, the Mother of all who love me, of those who cry to me, of those who have confidence in me. Here I will hear their weeping and their sorrows...their necessities and misfortunes...Listen and let it penetrate your heart...Do not be troubled or weighed down with grief. Do not fear any illness or vexation, anxiety or pain. Am I not here who am your Mother? Are you not under my shadow and protection? Am I not your foundation of life? Are you not in the folds of my mantle? In the crossing of my arms? Is there anything else you need?" (Francis Johnston, *The Wonder of Guadalupe: The Origin and Cult of the Miraculous Image of the Blessed Virgin in Mexico*, Illinois: Tan Books and Publishers, Inc., 1981, inside cover).

The conversion of the Aztecs (the native Mexicans) and multiple miracles moved Pope St. Pius XI to declare

*Something Ancient, Something New, Continued on page 11*

## CURRENT COUNCIL MEMBERS AND OFFICERS ARE:

**Judith M. Stegman, President,**  
2013 – 2015; Diocese of Lansing.

**Magalis Aguilera, Member-at-large,**  
2013 – 2015 (appointed **Vice-President**  
thru 2015); Archdiocese of Miami.

**Margaret Flipp, Treasurer,** 2014-2016,  
Archdiocese of San Francisco.

**Mary Kay Lacke, Member-at-large,**  
2014-2016 (appointed **Secretary**  
through 2015) Diocese of Steubenville.

**Florence Sundberg, Member-at-Large,**  
2012-2014, Archdiocese of Hartford.

**Marie Beccaloni, Member-at-large-elect,**  
2015-2017, Archdiocese of Chicago.

SERVING THE VOCATION OF CONSECRATED VIRGINITY



### Upcoming events:

#### **2015 National Convocation of United States Consecrated Virgins**

*August 12—August 16, 2015*



*Mundelein Retreat & Conference Center  
Archdiocese of Chicago*

#### **2015 National Information Conference on the Vocation of Consecrated Virginity**

*August 4-August 7, 2015*



*St. Francis Retreat Center  
DeWitt, Michigan  
Diocese of Lansing*

## Council News

### Announcements:

**USACV Website Update:** Elizabeth Lam reminds us that we are always happy to consider ideas to improve the USACV website. If anyone wants to lend a helping hand to keeping the site current, please let us know. We are always in need of this assistance.



### Upcoming Issues of *The Lamp*:

**February 2, 2015:** Feast of the Presentation and  
World Day of Consecrated Life

**May 31, 2015:** Trinity Sunday

**September 8, 2015:** Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary

**December 12, 2015:** Our Lady of Guadalupe



### Formation Resource Development Team—Mary Kay Lacke

During the last couple of months, I have received inquiries about the discernment and preparation processes for the consecration of a virgin. Consequently I have asked several consecrated virgins to describe their own experience in their dioceses. Their input has not only been very helpful for the inquirers but also very good material for Volume Two of *ORDO VIRGINUM* on discernment, preparation and ongoing formation in the vocation of consecrated virginity. I would welcome the written input of any consecrated virgin who would like to share her own experience on this subject. Such descriptions are very helpful in putting flesh on the *Praenotanda* of the Rite of Consecration. Please send your input to me at 1203 Maryland Ave., Steubenville, OH 43952 or [mklacke1292@gmail.com](mailto:mklacke1292@gmail.com). Thank you so much!

### Consecrated Virgins “Family” Scrapbook—Vickie Hamilton

I had hoped to have the family album completed in October. I am at the end of a two and a half year, top to bottom renovation of my house and unfortunately, this last phase didn't go as planned, so I had a lot to juggle. I hope to have the family album done before the end of the year. I apologize for the delay.

### Summer 2015 Retreat in Oregon:

Once again the Portland Archdiocese's consecrated virgins invite all consecrated virgins to a silent retreat next summer from July 23-26, 2015, at Our Lady of Peace Retreat house in the greater Portland, Oregon, area. Please note that for this next retreat we are adding one more day than we had this past summer so that we will gather together on Thursday afternoon, the 23rd, and conclude our retreat on Sunday, July 26, morning. For further information or to let us know that you are hoping to come, please get in touch with Regina Dibb: [firstjn416@gmail.com](mailto:firstjn416@gmail.com). More information to come in the future.



## From the President's journal . . .

*It seems appropriate that this first issue of The Lamp in the Year of Consecrated Life includes an array of insightful anniversary reflections from consecrated virgins of varying ages and backgrounds. Our witness in the Church is to an intimate spousal relationship with Jesus Christ – the spousal relationship He desires to offer to each and every soul. I hope that these reflections from consecrated virgins offer a key to the depth of that spousal relationship, which enables the consecrated virgin to embark on that special mission shared with all those in consecrated life. In the words of Pope Francis in his letter for the Year of Consecrated Life, “A whole world awaits us: men and women who have lost all hope, families in difficulty, abandoned children, young people without a future, the elderly, sick and abandoned, those who are rich in the world’s goods but impoverished within, men and women looking for a purpose in life, thirsting for the divine.”*

*Days in Rome dedicated to the Ordo Virginum are being planned for January 29 to 31, 2016, by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. We’re making inquiries about the possibility of arranging housing and activities for those who may want to travel to Rome during those days. Keep tuned. Also, later in 2016, His Eminence Raymond Leo Cardinal Burke has graciously accepted an invitation to be with us during our August Convocation. The dates and location are still to be determined.*

*I’d like to take this opportunity to thank Florence Sundberg for her three years of service on the leadership council of the USACV, and at the same time to thank her for her ongoing and faithful service with our Email Prayer Request Line. It’s a sensitive service, and we appreciate knowing that Florence takes a personal concern to assure that each request for prayer is given due and prompt attention. I’d also like to welcome Marie Beccaloni to the USACV leadership council, beginning in 2015.*

*May our Divine Spouse be praised!  
Judith Stegman*



## Life Corner: Florence Sundberg



As we witness the erosion of respect for human life in the violence carried out in our own country and around the world, let us draw inspiration from the words spoken by John Paul II at his Mass during his first visit to the United States, October 7, 1979:

*And so, we will stand up every time that human life is threatened.*

*When the sacredness of life before birth is attacked, we will stand up and proclaim that no one ever has the authority to destroy unborn life.*

*When a child is described as a burden or looked upon only as means to satisfy an emotional need, we will stand up and insist that every child is a unique and unrepeatable gift of God, with the right to a loving and united family.*

*When the institution of marriage is abandoned to human selfishness or reduced to a temporary, conditional arrangement that can be easily terminated, we will stand up and affirm the indissolubility of the marriage bond.*

*When the value of the family is threatened because of social and economic pressures, we will stand up and reaffirm that the family is “necessary not only for the private good of every person, but also for the common good of every society, nation and state.”*

*When freedom is used to dominate the weak... to deny basic necessities to people, we will stand up and reaffirm the demands of justice and social love.*

*When the sick, the aged, or the dying are abandoned in loneliness, we will stand up and proclaim that they are worthy of love, care and respect.”*

This is the season of new life, of hope, of joyful expectation. It is the season to proclaim that just as the Infant in the Womb of Mary sealed all human life with the sign of His sacredness so must we stand in joyful witness to the unique sacredness of every single human life created by God, in His image. Let us strive to bear witness to life at all times, in all ways, in every situation. Thus will we prepare in ways ancient and ever



new the coming of the Christ into our milieu, into our hearts, our lives. We, spouses of Jesus Christ, are called to generate new life in every situation, in every encounter, in every person – new life, His life, and that is as it should be.

## Consecration Anniversary Reflections

***Consecrated virgins celebrating significant anniversaries are invited to offer a reflection on their years of living as a consecrated virgin. We're pleased to offer a few stories in this issue of "The Lamp," and will offer more in future issues.***

### 40 Years Consecrated

**LORETTA MATULICH**, Archdiocese of Portland in Oregon, consecrated August 13, 1974

I can only compare being a consecrated virgin for 40 years to a couple who renews their wedding vows after the same number of years. How profound is that love that has matured over the years! Our intimate bond with our Divine Spouse lives in us and gives us LIFE and joy, and it only grows deeper as time goes on. How intense that love will be in eternity!

When I spoke with Ann Stitt, who also marked 40 years as a consecrated virgin this year, she agreed that she has seen the same phenomenon: the beautiful love that has deepened through the years in a married couple is so much more touching than witnessing a bride on her wedding day. Our love with Jesus only gets deeper and more profound as time goes on – in fidelity to Him, our First Love.



### 30 Years Consecrated

**ISABEL BETTWY**, Diocese of Steubenville, consecrated September 15, 1984

In 2010, I wrote: "Twenty-six years! It seems like yesterday." And here it is, four years later and I am celebrating thirty years of consecration—and it still seems like yesterday!

When I was consecrated on September 15, 1984 by Bishop Albert Ottenweller (now deceased) of the Diocese of Steubenville, I was the first person in the Diocese to be consecrated under the revised Rite of Consecration. Now, thirty years later we have five women in the Diocese who have been consecrated under the revised Rite. Our Diocese is truly blessed, and I along with it. Recently four of us were privileged to celebrate Holy Mass and have dinner with our present Bishop, Jeffrey M. Monforton who is very supportive of our vocation.

Several years after my consecration, I met Bishop Ottenweller at an event. He greeted me and said, "Good choice. I have never seen you happier." That remains true to this day. And it is true that because of my consecration each day my relationship with the Lord deepens as my understanding of the meaning of the spousal relationship with the Lord grows. The pace of my life has slowed down as my age goes up. I live a fairly quiet life, am blessed to have the Blessed Sacrament in my home, am a member of a Catholic, Charismatic, Covenant Community who support my living out my vocation, and I assist with sacristan duties for our daily 7:00 morning Mass. I do a little gardening, but that is limited to a few tomato plants and some flowers. Daily Holy Mass, the Divine Office and personal prayer make up a major portion of my day. It's wonderful to have the leisure to sit before the Lord and "bask" in His presence.

I began writing this little article in late July, before hip and knee surgeries. I continue now by acknowledging that 2014 is one year I will never forget! Thirty years as a Consecrated Virgin—a true blessing. A new hip on August 13 and a new knee on November 17—both blessings. Now I am in the recuperation stages from the knee surgery. I miss going to daily Mass. Thank God for EWTN that I can tune in to the Liturgy each day. It isn't the same as being there in person, but it is a good substitute because I can still receive Holy Communion daily—another great blessing, one I could not live without. I also have time for quiet reflection and the opportunity to count my blessings. One of the blessings I thank God for each day is having Mary Kay Lacke living next door. She is a fantastic help. She is my "wheels" for the surgery and doctor appointments, at least until I am permitted to drive again. She has been preparing dinner each day—another blessing. Being a member of the Community of God's Love, I am blessed by phone calls and more importantly by prayers.

I attribute my quick recovery from hip replacement to the prayers of people from all over the world. I know the prayers are helping with the knee recovery. I couldn't sleep last night because the pain was very real until I gave in and took some strong pain medication—another blessing. The medical advances are amazing and we have the benefit of them all. You are all in my prayers daily, but especially during this time of reduced activity. Please keep me in prayer. As I mentioned above, it is wonderful to have leisure to sit before the Lord and "bask" in His presence.



## **15 Years Consecrated**

**KATHLEEN GOODYEAR**, Diocese of Columbus, consecrated, October 2, 1999

*Excerpts from an article by Tim Puet in the November 16, 2014 edition of The Catholic Times, Diocese of Columbus:*



“Kathleen Goodyear of Reynoldsburg St. Pius X Church celebrated her 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a consecrated virgin during a Mass in the church on Saturday, Nov. 8, with Bishop Frederick Campbell as principal celebrant.

Goodyear is one of three consecrated virgins in the diocese. The others are Molly McCarrick of Columbus, who became a consecrated virgin in 2002, and Jo Ann Guinther of Danville, consecrated in 2009. Goodyear said the three support each other by staying in close contact via phone, email, and occasional lunches. Another woman in the diocese is in formation to become a consecrated virgin.

‘As a consecrated virgin, I’m able to completely devote my life to Our Divine Spouse, as well as serve those around me,’ Goodyear said. She said she had known since she was about 10 years old that she had a religious vocation, and learned about consecrated virginity in the mid-1990’s through the book *And You Are Christ’s*, by Father Thomas Dubay.

She works as a unit coordinator in the main recovery room at Mount Carmel East Hospital in Columbus. ‘My vocation is to work with the sick and the elderly,’ she said. ‘I love what I do and the joy I feel from my vocation seems to just be enhanced at work. I am pretty bubbly at work. I think that helps the patients and my co-workers. Some may think I am a little too cheerful, but I can’t help it. I just get a little giddy from loving Christ so much, and I use that giddiness to bring a smile to those I meet, whether in the recovery room, the hallway, or even on the phone.’

She said that when they find out she is a consecrated virgin, ‘people want to know more because little about it is known. I want to get the word out about this most beautiful vocation. It is my mission to spread the word about being a consecrated virgin living in the world. If people, especially young women, knew how richly blessed you become as a consecrated virgin in so many ways, I think more would consider it.’”

## **Consecration Announcements:**

### **UNITED STATES:**

June 28, 2014, **Michelle A. Black**, Archdiocese of Denver, at the hand of The Most Reverend Samuel Aquila. (See photos at right.)

August 15, 2014, **Stacy Megan Cretzmeyer**, Diocese of Charleston, at the hands of The Most Reverend Robert E. Guglielmone. (See reflection on page 10)

### **Upcoming:**

January 3, 2015, **Karina Reyes**, 11:30 a.m., Saint Procopius Catholic Church, Chicago, Illinois. For details contact Karina at madero474@gmail.com.

January 21, 2015, **AnnaMae Muryasz**, Noon, Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, Camden, New Jersey.



### **FRANCE:**

September 28, 2014, **Marie Josee Jeanne**, Diocese of Creteil, at the hands of the Most Reverend Michel Santier.

### **ITALY:**

September 7, 2013, **Lucia Peppe and Margherita Colombini**, in the Basilica of St. Ambrose in Milan, at the hands of His Eminence Angelo Cardinal Scola.

***Be wise: make ready your lamps. Behold, the Bridegroom comes; Go out to meet him.***



15 Years Consecrated

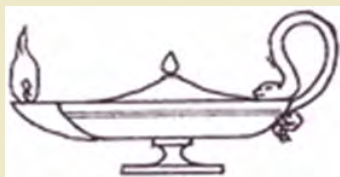
**HELEN GROUDIS**, Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph (MO), consecrated October 19, 1998

Helen Groudís celebrated her 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a consecrated virgin, but she also marked her 70<sup>th</sup> year of vowed religious life at a Mass celebrated by Bishop Robert Finn.

An article by Kevin Kelly in the *Catholic Key* quoted Helen, "There is nobody as good as the Lord for your husband." The article notes that Sister Helen "began religious life as a Sister of Jesus Crucified and the Sorrowful Mother, a Lithuanian order reflecting her heritage, and an order that has passed into history. Sister Helen recalls her yearning for religious life as a child, growing up in the very shadow of her ethnic Lithuanian parish in Boston. 'I've been blowing kisses to Jesus since I was six years old,' she said. She recalled insisting so strongly that her parents allow her to join the convent at 16 years old, when they finally, and tearfully, relented as she boarded a train to Brockton, Pa., her parents unsure that they would ever see her again.

But they did. And Sister Helen even was at her mother's side when she passed into the eternal life. 'She saw that I was crying and she said, *Don't cry for me, I'm not your real mother. God just chose me to take care of you for a while. Your real mother is the Blessed Mother in heaven, I'll never forget that,*' she said."

Helen recalls that many years ago when she was still a novice her spiritual director was certain she was called to be a consecrated virgin and he gave her special permission to make a private vow of virginity. She says that when she walked down the aisle on the day of her religious profession as a Bride of Christ and said 'yes,' she said it *forever* and meant it! Helen was so surprised when Bishop Finn chose October 19<sup>th</sup> – the actual date of her consecration as a virgin living in the world – as the date for the 2014 Diocesan celebration of Jubilarians. Helen writes, "the greatest gift and blessing I experience is the thought that He, my Divine Spouse, had chosen me to be His Bride!!! This thought carries me through all the difficulties and trials, and gives me so much strength, which I thank Him for every day. He has filled me with joy and peace!"



**ALICE CLAIRE MANSFIELD**, Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, consecrated May 8, 2004

Ave Maria! From all eternity God, the Father of Mercies, has loved me with an everlasting love and drawn me to Himself (Jer 31:3). When I first received our Lord Jesus Christ in Holy Communion as a 7-year-old child, I intuited that He had claimed me as His and His alone. I was too young to have even heard the phrase "spousal love," but such is God's amazing grace – I knew, I simply knew. And gradually I understood as little by little, over many long years, our dear Lord revealed His plan to me. Behold, the Bridegroom! Forty-eight years later on May 8, 2004, He made me His bride when Archbishop Joseph Fiorenza bestowed upon me the Rite of Consecration to a Life of Virginity. After ten glorious years as a Bride of Christ, I still exult constantly with exceedingly great joy for "I am espoused to Him whom the angels serve; sun and moon stand in wonder at His beauty."

Ah, such nuptial bliss! True, there have been mountains to climb, rivers to cross, deserts to traverse – and there will be many others ahead as nuptial bliss doesn't eliminate the realities of human life or the demands of the narrow way that leads to the Kingdom of God. Yet this is how I live out my consecration day after day, by following the Lamb wherever He goes (Rev 4:14). All ground is holy for He, the All-Holy One, is there. Where our Divine Spouse is, there His bride belongs – and there I always want to be, happily about my Father's business.

What St. Maria Faustina wrote in her diary after she professed her final vows describes well my experience of these past ten years since my consecration: "Now a gray, ordinary day has begun. The solemn hours of the perpetual vows have passed, but God's great grace has remained in my soul. I feel I am all God's; I feel I am His child, I feel I am wholly God's property. I experience this in a way that can be physically sensed. I am completely at peace about everything, because I know it is the Spouse's business to look after me. I have forgotten about myself completely. My trust placed in His Most Merciful Heart has no limit. I am continually united with Him." (*Divine Mercy in My Soul*, #244)

Domine non sum dingus...truly, I am not worthy! And yet, according to our dear Lord's mysterious, adorable will, He has espoused Himself to me, frail, weak and imperfect creature that I am. I have found Him whom my soul loves, and I will never let Him go. I belong to my Beloved, and my Beloved belongs to me. (Cf. Songs 3:4, 6:3). Deo gratias!

## **10 Years Consecrated**

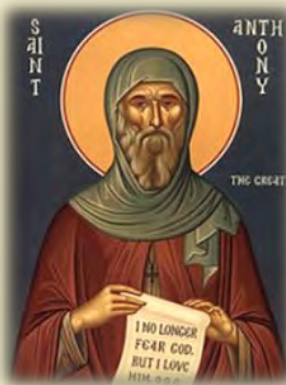
**LOIS GANDT**, Diocese of Bridgeport, consecrated October 31, 2004

At the time of my consecration I was working on my dissertation on the renowned monk Antony of Egypt, the final requirement for a doctorate in theology at Fordham University. I knew that I was called to consecrated life, and living this ancient form of religious life seemed like a perfect fit. (The biography of St. Antony, written by St. Athanasius, contains the first reference to Christian virgins living in a "parthenon," or convent; before embarking on the solitary life, Antony had entrusted his young sister to them). Although I was seeing the path that God had laid out for me as clearly as was possible at that time, I now know that I was only seeing things "through a glass, darkly," knowing only "in part" what God had in mind (I Cor. 13:12).

I was consecrated by then-Bishop Lori (now Archbishop of Baltimore), who had graciously agreed to perform the Rite at my home parish, the Basilica of St. John the Evangelist, a historic Gothic church with a "wedding cake" back altar. Most of the parishioners probably didn't notice that a reliquary had been placed above the Tabernacle for this Mass, and they certainly didn't know that it contained a relic of the True Cross. The presence of this relic was important to me as a reminder that the ceremony was ultimately about glorifying Our Lord.

The Cross has come to have particular significance since that day, as I have learned that an important part of my spousal relationship with Christ is the privilege of joining Him in carrying the Cross. Our Divine Spouse gently invites me to share His Cross as though he is offering a enticing delicacy, something that will be truly delightful. And as difficult as it may be to walk the *via crucis*, it does delight because it is when I carry the Cross that I am closest to Him, for He is there at my side sharing the burden while at the same time drawing me into the loving depths of His Sacred Heart.

Jesus similarly invites me to open up my heart more fully so that I can become more united to His Sacred Heart. He has been generous in giving me



roses as a reminder of my favorite couplet from among the hundreds composed by Fr. Johann Scheffler, a 17th-century German mystic and poet: "Your heart receives God with all his goodness, when it towards him like a rose opens up." It is beautiful to watch the outer petals of a rose open up. However, our Spouse challenges us to open *completely* to him, even though the inner petals are often not a thing of beauty, as they may be in awkward positions that detract from the symmetry of the rose. Jesus' desire is that my very imperfect heart will come to be totally joined to His Sacred Heart, and I look forward to the next ten years of journeying into His Love.

## **5 Years Consecrated**

**JENNA COOPER**, Archdiocese of New York, consecrated January 3, 2009

I first felt called to be a bride of Christ when I was twelve years old. At that time, I assumed I would be a Sister of some sort, although I wasn't very familiar with religious life specifically. I just knew that I wanted to offer Christ my whole heart for my whole life.

When I was eighteen, I started visiting different religious communities. But even while this was a positive experience overall, I didn't sense that God was calling me to join any particular one of them. I was quite troubled by this, until one day when a priest gave me a copy of the *Rite of Consecration to a Life of Virginity*. As soon as I read it, I knew right away that I had found my vocation.

And so when I was nineteen, I contacted the Vicar for Religious in my archdiocese to ask about the possibility of becoming a consecrated virgin. At first, I was turned away for being too young. But a few years later, I felt that God was prompting me to try asking again. When I was twenty-two, I had a personal meeting with the Vicar for Religious, and much to my surprise and delight I was accepted as a candidate on the spot! I was solemnly consecrated to a life of virginity on January 3, 2009, when I was twenty-three years old. One thing I remember about that time is how many people commented (some with respect and encouragement, but others with concern and even disapproval) on how young I was to be making such a big commitment. But I remember feeling more than ready, since it seemed to me that I had already waited half my life for this!





## ***Consecration Reflections continued***

(Jenna Cooper)

It made me so happy to give myself to Christ in such a permanent way while I still had my whole adult life ahead of me. I felt so blessed and privileged to be able to love Christ in such an extravagant way. It was my own chance to break the scriptural alabaster jar.

I am still very deeply grateful that I had this chance to be extravagant with our Lord. However, over the past five years, I've found that I've also become quite grateful for something I didn't expect: the "ordinariness" of my vocation. Over time, my call to live as a spouse of Christ has shifted from seeming like an impossible marvel to being simply who I am. This quiet confidence in knowing I belong entirely to God is more precious to me than even the first fervor of discovering my vocation, just as I find even more joy in offering Christ my fidelity in each passing year than I did on my lovely consecration day.



Jenna Cooper, Feast of Saint Agnes 2014, Rome.

**MARION STRISHOCK**, Archdiocese of Washington, consecrated March 1, 2009

The five years since my consecration as a virgin living in the world have been among the most joyful years of my life. This does not mean they have been without trials and difficulty. God has used aging parents, family health issues, unexpected expenses and other issues that are beyond my control to take me to a new level of trust in His providential care and love.

God is also calling me to a deeper level of intimacy with Him since my consecration. When I am before the Blessed Sacrament, no matter how close I am, I am never close enough to our Beloved Spouse. There is a longing within me to be one with Him. This has led to a greater awareness of His Presence within me. My spiritual director introduced me to the Carthusian spirituality. I am incorporating greater periods of silence

into my life so that I can be aware of God while I do household chores, yard work, walking, etc. I am better able to hear Him or experience Him in the ordinary events of my day. When I am copying papers at school, walking the halls, or setting up for Mass I quietly reflect on God dwelling within me. At other times in the day I pray various mantras to maintain an inner peace particularly when the day is hectic. I have a long way to go before this becomes an automatic and natural response. I think it will always be an area of growth for me, but I leave it in God's hands and in His time.

My work with my students and the priests serving the school has expanded and requires more time outside of regular school hours. I am also still heavily involved in activities at my parish. The priests are wonderful role models as servants of God and it is easy to see why they need our prayers. God places certain people in my life to remind me of groups of people who need our prayers: the homeless, the mentally ill, people in jail and their victims, and those with no one to pray for them. Once in a while God gives me a glimpse of how He works through me by a comment made by a student or one of the priests with whom I work. At those moments I am filled with awe at how God is able to accomplish His will through ordinary activities that seem so insignificant in my eyes. I am reminded that I am nothing without God and that all things are possible with God.

Balancing the prayer life with my active life of service is crucial to maintaining the joy and inner peace. The prayer drives my service and my service leads me back to prayer. When the service tries to draw me away from the quiet of prayer, I am unsettled and anxious, and my work suffers. I balance both areas by setting a cutoff time for my work so that I have time to spend in prayer. Since I always have some school work over the weekend and also serve my parish in various capacities, my spiritual director will not allow me to participate in any committee meetings over the weekend. He feels the remainder of the time should be spent with family, household chores, and recreation with friends. This rule has really worked well for me in balancing all the areas of my life. I share it hoping that it will help other consecrated virgins.

**MICHELE DiVITO**, Diocese of Buffalo, consecrated June 13, 2009

I was asked many months ago to write a reflection on the anniversary of my consecration and there never seemed to be enough time. What a poor excuse! I was very caught up in the world: working full time, visiting

## ***Consecration Reflections continued***

(Michele DeVito)

my dad who has dementia, other family obligations and volunteering at my parish in various ministries. None of these are bad things to be busy with but I lost focus. I lost attachment to my anchor, my spouse. Thanks be to God, through the people He has placed in my midst, I begin again to reach out to my spouse. To say again you are all I want, you are all I love, I give myself to you. Please put my ego and vanity behind me and lead me in your ways!

I read the Pope's letter on the year dedicated to consecrated life. This passage touched me and helped me to return to the simplicity of my vocation as a consecrated virgin: "Once again, we have to ask ourselves: Is Jesus really our first and only love, as we promised he would be when we professed our vows? Only if he is, will we be empowered to love, in truth and mercy, every person who crosses our path. For we will have learned from Jesus the meaning and practice of love. We will be able to love because we have his own heart."

I remember the day of my consecration. It was a beautiful, sunny June morning. But I remember more how I cried like a baby with the recognition of my sinfulness. Why did God choose me? But even stronger than this was the great knowledge of the heart that I am loved with a greater love than this world can provide or understand. God loves me! I am the beloved! WOW!!!

And with this renewed truth present once again I can say to my divine spouse...I love you with the smallness of who I am but with the largeness of a heart striving to be like your own. My identity as a consecrated virgin has many complexities but my vocation as a consecrated virgin is so simple...to love. Dietrich Von Hildebrand said it best:

"Surely the bride of Christ, wedded as she is to love incarnate, must exceed all in love. We now know why consecrated virginity represents the most exalted state on earth because it is the objective embodiment of love's supreme mystery. It involves a marriage in the strictest sense with Christ. It is not only the state of greatest purity but the state of greatest love. The vocation of Christ's bride is simple: to love."

I thank God for the past 5 years and joyfully anticipate the next 5! Praised be Jesus Christ.

**MARILYN WAGNER**, Diocese of Toledo, consecrated December 5, 2009

I am increasingly grateful and appreciative of what this vocation is. His steadfast attentiveness is unwavering, down to small details, so of course, the level of indebtedness and awe increases likewise. What a blessed lot we are! What joy to be espoused by He whom angels serve...and inherit their greater service to ourselves! Humility becomes a fruit as well as a virtue; a sweet fruit which brings Him closer.

## ***Newly Consecrated***

**Stacy Megan Cretzmeyer**, Diocese of Charleston, consecrated August 15, 2014

My earthly wedding to the King of the Universe took place at St. Michael the Archangel Catholic Church in Murrells Inlet, SC, on the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. I was consecrated a bride of Christ by our Bishop, The Most Reverend Robert E. Guglielmone. To my knowledge, I am the only Consecrated Virgin Living in the World in the Diocese of Charleston, SC at this time. I believe there was another woman who received this consecration in our diocese but has since moved to another state.

I am very grateful to several priests of our diocese who have guided me during a long period of discernment, during which time I have been working as a licensed professional counselor in private practice, and have been an hourly coordinator for Perpetual Eucharistic Adoration at St. Michael's Church. I would like to share how St. Kateri Tekakwitha invited me to draw closer to her and to ask for her intercession as I prepared for my wedding day, and now, as I live as a spouse of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Around the time that my application materials were submitted to our bishop, a fellow parishioner who has long been devoted to St. Kateri and visits her shrine periodically, gave me a blessed medal and holy water from the spring at her shrine in NY. Although I did not



***"The Church must be attractive. Wake up the world! Be witnesses of a different way of acting, of living!"***

***It is possible to live differently in this world...It is this witness I expect from you!" Pope Francis***

## ***Consecration Reflections continued***

have a devotion to St. Kateri prior to that time, and knew very little about her, I felt very strongly that I should pray to her. I began to pray a novena asking for St. Kateri's intercession and promised her that if my bishop would accept me as a candidate for this consecration, I would make her better known. My bishop accepted me on the Feast of St. John the Apostle, and then I was so grateful, that I continued to pray in gratitude to St. Kateri, entrusting the progression of my preparation for this consecration to her, as well as to Our Lady, Virgin of Virgins, and to St. Joseph, Protector of Virgins, and to St. Philomena, of whom I have been a devotee for many years.

About this time, the director of our Diocesan Shrine of Our Lady of South Carolina, Our Lady and Mother of Joyful Hope, Father Stanley Smolenski, spma, sent me a copy of an essay that was delivered at the Mariological Conference and was published by the Mariological Society of America. The essay was about the Marian spirituality of St. Kateri Tekakwitha. Father Smolenski, who developed the Corpus Christi Marian Movement, of which I am an oblate\* [this is not a secular third order, nor a religious institute, but has been the spiritual basis of my consecrated life], told me that he thought the essay, written by Lynn Marie Busch, herself a consecrated virgin living in the world, would be of great interest to me.

When I received the essay in the mail, I was stunned to read the subtitle: **Iroquois Virgin and Co-Patroness of the United States Association of Consecrated Virgins.** I had not known that St. Kateri was the co-patroness of the United States Association of Consecrated Virgins! When I read this wonderful essay, I was very moved to discover that, in addition to her vow of perpetual virginity, St. Kateri was also consecrated by vow to the Holy Eucharist and to the Holy Cross. I told Father Smolenski, my spiritual director (who had not known about my novena and my growing devotion to St. Kateri), that I wanted to make the same vows to the Holy Eucharist and to the Holy Cross and he advised me to ask the bishop, who later gave his consent. I offer my great gratitude to St. Kateri for her powerful intercession, and for befriending me in such a special way. Praise to our Divine Spouse!



## ***Continue: Something Ancient, Something New***

Our Lady of Guadalupe as the "Heavenly Patroness" of Latin American countries. His successor Pope Pius XII after establishing nine shrines in Italy dedicated to our Lady of Guadalupe, ordered the sacred image of Mexico to be crowned again and formally proclaimed her to be the "Empress of All the Americas." "Hail, O Virgin of Guadalupe!" His Holiness declared, "We to whom the admirable ordering of Providence has confided (not taking into account our own unworthiness), the sacred treasure of Divine Wisdom on earth for the salvation of souls, place again upon your brow the crown that forever places under your powerful patronage the purity and integrity of the Mexican faith and of the entire American continent. For we are certain that as long as you are recognized as Queen and Mother, Mexico and America will be safe." Pope John XXIII proclaimed a Marian Year of our Lady of Guadalupe and extolled her as "the Mother of Americas." Pope Paul VI bestowed a singular honor on the shrine by presenting it with a golden rose in 1966, a privilege subsequently accorded only to Lourdes and Fatima. In 1979 John Paul II visited the Basilica; he is the only Pontiff who has visited Guadalupe. (Francis Johnston, 95-96, 135).

Let us pray to our Mother and ask her intercession as we join our prayers to the following reflection from Cardinal Burke, founder of the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in La Crosse, Wisconsin: "The greatest poverty and suffering of our time is the loss of a sense of who we are as children of God and, therefore, the loss of hope and direction in our lives. Our spiritual poverty demands a spiritual remedy. The Coming of the Son of God into the world is the true and lasting remedy of our spiritual poverty, God the Father's perfect act of love for us as His sons and daughters. The Mother of God, Our Lady of Guadalupe, is constantly directing us to the mystery of the Incarnation which gives us unfailing hope and sound direction for our lives. The Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe will be a proven means by which the Mother of God can lead us to her Incarnate Son to discover anew our dignity as sons and daughters of God in Him, to be filled with hope and to give hope to our world." Raymond Leo Cardinal Burke, [www.guadalupe Shrine.org](http://www.guadalupe Shrine.org).



## ***In Praise of the Immaculate Virgin, By Diane Christine Farr***

Let us consider the love that exists between the Most Blessed Trinity and the Blessed Virgin Mary. In the Song of Songs we read, "You are all beautiful my beloved, and there is no blemish in you." (Song of Songs 4:7). The Church applies this verse to the privilege of Mary's Immaculate Conception. The Catechism states, "The Fathers of the Eastern tradition call the Mother of God, 'The All-Holy.'" (ccc. 493.)

The virgin of Nazareth was more mindful of the presence of God in her heart than she was of herself since she possessed the fullness of God's grace.

She would have recognized the profound beauty and holiness of virginity as it relates to a spousal love and union with God. She is truly the virgin of virgins as she embraces God's will and becomes the mother of the Word Incarnate. Let us ponder the deep union Our Lady experienced with God as the Holy Spirit came upon her and the power of the Most High overshadowed her. It is no wonder that she exclaimed in her Magnificat, "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, My spirit rejoices in God my Savior."

In His Catechesis on Mary Mother of God, St. Pope John Paul II calls Mary the virgin of the covenant. He goes on to say, "As the new daughter of Zion, Mary was particularly suited to entering into the spousal covenant with God more and better than any member of the chosen people, she could offer the Lord the true heart of a bride."

Given our Lady's words at Lourdes, "I am the Immaculate Conception." We may truly discern that the effects of such a great grace extended far beyond one moment in time. While living a seemingly ordinary life the Blessed Virgin maintained perfect fidelity to God's grace and lived in harmony with the Divine Will. She possessed a keen awareness of the ugliness and consequences of sin and thus her union with the suffering of her divine Son on the cross was more complete.

As consecrated virgins we should pray for the grace to comprehend the inner beauty of our mother's immaculate heart and learn from her who is the, "Seat of Wisdom." Blessed Miriam Teresa Demjanovich tells us in one of her conferences, "Think reflectively on Mary's years of preparation before the Word was made flesh in her virginal womb. Her Divine maternity was a reward of her fidelity in seeking first the kingdom of God. From her earliest infancy she sought only Him who her soul loved."

Jesus has given his brides a tremendous gift in giving us his mother as a perfect model of consecrated virginity. The Immaculate Virgin wishes to draw us into a closer union with her divine Son, if we allow her to lead us. We should ask her to lead us during our times of prayer and contemplation so that we may see the mysteries of our faith through her eyes and love Jesus with the sentiments of her own heart. Let us pray for her spirit of selfless giving so that we may be attentive to the needs of those around us. We may ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to us our own selfishness and to be free from all deception. Our divine Bridegroom wishes to see in us a reflection of the great purity, humility and love that are characteristics of his virgin mother. The radiance of holy virginity should touch every aspect of our being, delighting the heart of Jesus. The sweet fragrance of this flower of our virginal love is poured forth in praise and adoration of our heavenly king.

The Blessed Virgin is an image of the Church perfected in Christ. As we are also icons of the Church let us ponder this prayer for the feast of the Immaculate Conception taken from the new Roman Missal. "For you preserved the most Blessed Virgin Mary from all stain of original sin, so that in her, endowed with the rich fullness of your grace, you might prepare a worthy mother for your Son and signify the beginning of the Church His beautiful bride without spot or wrinkle. She, the most pure Virgin was to bring forth a Son, the innocent Lamb who would wipe away our offences, you placed her above all others to be for your people an advocate of grace and a model of holiness."



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